

The Wisdom of owning GOD
for the Guide of our Youth.

A *4*
S E R M O N

Preach'd to
Young People

A T *Jan 3/4*
H A N D - A L L E Y :

On the 25th. of December, 1716.

By J O H N E V A N S.

Publisch'd at the Desire of several
that heard it.

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JER. III. 4.

*Wilt thou not from this Time
cry unto me, My Father,
Thou art the Guide of my
Youth?*



THESE are the Words of GOD to revolted *Israel*, inviting them to a Return to Him. So I understand them, rather than as some Interpreters take their Sense, as if GOD intended to upbraid them in these Expressions with an arrogant Claim of Relation to Him, while they continu'd obstinate in Sin. 'Tis true, they often did so, and were often blam'd for it. So *Hosea* describes them, *Israel shall cry unto me, My God, Hos. viii. we know Thee.* GOD in the next Verse, re-^{2, 3.}jects their Pretension; *Israel hath cast off the Thing that is good; the Enemy shall pursue him.*



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Joh. viii. 41. While they were rejecting the Son of GOD, they had the same Confidence, *We have one Father, even God.*

BUT the Text appears rather to me to be a gracious Call to them to do this in earnest, than a reproaching of them for doing it presumptuously. As in *ver. 1.* GOD intermixes an Invitation to Repentance, with the Representation of their Sins; so it is natural enough to suppose, that while He is proceeding in the same general Argument of Reproof, He should go on to interpose also some Encouragements to return to Him.

WE may observe it to have been a common Metaphor us'd by this Prophet *Jeremiah*, and by *Ezekiel*, who was very near his Contemporary, to consider the People of *Israel*, as if in their several successive Generations they made but one Person, passing thro' the different Ages and Periods of Life. The Course of GOD's Providence towards them, and of their Behaviour to GOD, thro' one Age after another, are often express'd in Terms which carry an Allusion to the several Ages of Man's Life. *Ezekiel* carries on the Metaphor thro' a considerable Part of a Chapter. The Story of their Nation is related there, as one would describe the Life of a single Person from his Beginning till he arrives at Maturity. They are trac'd to their

Pro-

Progenitors. *Thy Birth and thy Nativity was* Ver. 3.
of the Land of Canaan; thy Father was an Amo-
rite, and thy Mother an Hittite. Their weak
 and low Estate at the Beginning of their Peo-
 ple, is set out by the helpless Condition of a
 new-born Infant: And GOD's Kindness to- Ver. 4, 5
 ward them in those early Days, by the Care
 and Kindness of a tender Parent, making all
 proper Provision for his Child, and following
 him with a watchful Eye and a bountiful Ver. 6, —
 Hand, till he comes to Maturity. On the ¹⁴
 other hand, their Revolts from GOD to Ido-
 latry, after their State was grown up, are re-
 presented by a young Woman's playing the
 Harlot, and so disappointing the tender Care,
 and reasonable Expectations of her Parents, Ver. 15,
 when she enters upon the World. *Ec.*

IN like Manner, this Prophet sets before
 that Generation of *Israel*, to which he pro-
 phesy'd, the Vertues of their Ancestors, as
the Kindness of their Youth, the Love of their Jer. ii. 2.
Esponsals, when they went after him in the Wil-
derness. With the same View he seems in the
 Text to mean by *their Youth*, the earlier Times
 of their Nation. Q. d. Wilt thou not apply
 to me as thy Father, the Guide of thy An-
 cestors?

BUT when GOD makes use of such an Al-
 lusion in expostulating with that Generation,
 to

to induce them to return to Himself, He plainly supposes an obvious Truth in that which was the Ground of the Metaphor, That as He was their Father, He was the proper Guide of Youth. And the Expostulation must carry at least an equal Force to every Man personally consider'd. *Wilt thou not from this Time cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth?* And from that Consideration, I shall think myself fully justify'd in addressing it to young People, as GOD's reasonable Expectation from them. And I shall proceed upon these *Four Heads*.

I. To explain the Frame and Behaviour we may suppose recommended, by crying unto GOD, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth.

II. To shew the Reasonableness of it : Or to expostulate with Youth, in order to persuade them to take this Course. *Wilt thou not cry unto me?*

III. To consider the Circumstance of Time, from which such a Behaviour is eminently to be expected. From this Time.

IV.

IV. To propose some Directions, how you may expect to find G O D's Fatherly Guidance.

I. I W O U L D explain the Frame and Behaviour here recommended. Or, what we may suppose included in *Crying unto God, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my Youth.*

THE Expression is fit enough to take in Three Things.

I. A T H A N K F U L Acknowledgment of G O D's Fatherly Care and Guidance of us hitherto. *Q. d.* Wilt not thou own I have fully answer'd the Character, and fill'd up the Relation of a Father to thee, by having been the Guide of thy Youth? And certainly young People, who have proceeded but a little Way in Life, as well as those who are farther advanc'd, have had many Opportunities to observe the Care and Conduct of a kind Providence towards them. You are greatly indebted to your earthly Parents, and must ever owe them your grateful Acknowledgments, for all their tender Affection, and faithful Guidance: But there is a Father in Heaven, to whom, tho' He is out of Sight, you are infinitely more indebted. *Is not He thy Father, which hath bought thee? Hath He not made thee, and established thee? Thy Substance was not hid from Him, when thou wast made* Deut. xxxii. 6. Psam. exxxix. 15.

made in secret, and curiously wrought. Thou
 Pſal. xxiii. *haſt been caſt upon Him from the Womb; and*
 10. and *holden up by Him ever ſince. While you were*
 lxxi. 6. *unable to take the leaſt Care of yourſelves,*
He car'd for you, protect'd you, and guided
you with his Eye. In your Wants He has
ſeaſonably ſupply'd you, and in Dangers deli-
ver'd you. He has made your Lot to fall
in pleaſant Places, and order'd all the merci-
ful Circumſtances of your Pilgrimage: So
that having obtained Help of God, you continue
unto this Day. Is it not then highly fit, tho'
you ſhould as yet have found the Benefit of
his Conduct no farther than into the youth-
ful Part of Life, that you ſhould now begin
to pay the Tribute of a thankful Acknowledg-
ment to Him, who has brought you hitherto?
Surely GOD has Conſcience on his Side in
this Matter.

2. A PENITENT Application to GOD,
 in the Manner in which a returning Prodi-
 gal ſhould apply to his Father, as to one, who
has a Right to be the Guide of his Youth,
 may very properly be expreſs'd in the Lan-
 guage of the Text. Has a Child behav'd un-
 dutifully to a kind, indulgent Parent? Has He
 flown in the Face of all his tender Affection,
 and turn'd Rebel and Prodigal? Will he not
 think it highly fit, when he comes to him-
 ſelf, to go down on his Knees to his offend-
 ed

ed Father, to confess his Faults, and beg his Father's Pardon? This is the real Case of us all with Reference to our Heavenly Father. He has the most undoubted Right and Claim to all filial Duty from us: *Doubtless He is our Father*, and as such, deserves Honour and Obedience from us, that we should allow Him in every Thing to prescribe to us. But the youngest among us have been undutiful Children, and begun early to break the Bands asunder. If we have yet escap'd the open pollutions which are in the World thro' Lust, and have not in the literal Sense *wasted our Substance with riotous living*: yet we are all estrang'd from the Womb; and Conscience must tell us, That we have thought, and spoke, and acted, that which was justly displeasing to our Common Father in innumerable Instances.

" Should not we then *cry to God, My Father,*
 " Thou hast a just Claim to be *the Guide of*
 " *my Youth*; but I have not allow'd Thee to
 " be so. In many Instances I have refus'd
 " to hearken to Thee. I see my Fault, I see
 " my Folly, that in refusing to follow Thy
 " Conduct, I wickedly trampled upon Thy
 " Authority, and forsook my own Mercies:
 " It would have been much better with me,
 " if I had taken Thy Counsel, and submit-
 " ted to Thy Guidance. *Father, I have sinned* Luke xv.
 " *against Heaven, and in Thy Sight, and am no* 21.
 " *more worthy to be called Thy Son.* Thou in-
 " vitest

Jer. iii.
22.

“viteſt Prodigals to return, *Return, ye back-ſliding Children: Behold, I come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord my God.*” It is to acknowledge His Fatherly Relation, and the Duty we owe Him thereupon, that He ſhould be allow’d to rule and guide us, with Shame and Sorrow for our Undutifulneſs.

3. A SOLEMN Acceptance of GOD for our Father, and the Guide of our Youth from this Time forward, will compleat that becoming Temper, which theſe Words are fit to ſuggeſt to us. In the Original ’tis only, *My Father, Thou, the Guide of my Youth.* Which may be ſupply’d either as looking backward, Thou *haſt been ſo*, to expreſs GOD’s undeſerv’d Goodneſs, and fatherly Care of them in Times paſſ’d. Or, as acknowledging His rightful Claim. Thou art my Father, and therefore Thou *ſhouldeſt* be allow’d to be my Guide. I own my Injuſtice and Undutifulneſs, in not being guided by Thee. So far we have conſider’d the Words already. But we may alſo underſtand them as looking forward, Thou art my Father, and Thou *ſhalt be* my Guide. “I conſent to it as my reaſon-
“able Service, to put myſelf entirely, and
“unreſervedly under thy Conduct, that
“Thou ſhouldeſt Exerciſe this Right of a Fa-
“ther to manage me as Thou pleaſeſt. I had
“rather be guided by Thee, than be left to
“act of my own Head. Let thy Eye then
“be

“ be upon me, and thy Wisdom direct me,
“ as a Father would care for his Child : For
“ I take Thee for my Father, and therefore
“ for the Guide of my Youth.”

THIS is the Frame, which I would now recommend to young People. And to that Purpose proceed——

II. To shew the Reasonableness of such a Determination: Or to expostulate the Matter with you, as I am led to do by the Manner of speaking which GOD uses to *Israel* in the Text. *Wilt thou not thus cry unto me?* Can it be suppos'd, if you will allow yourselves to consider the Case, that you should be so averse to your own Interest, so insensible of the best Way to your own Happiness, as to refuse to put yourselves into my Hands, or even to demur upon settling this great Concern, that I shall be the Guide of your Youth? To make this plain to you, I desire you would seriously lay to Heart the following Considerations.

I. THE World we are in makes a Guide absolutely necessary to all. 'Tis such a State of Things, wherein we shall run the greatest Risque, if we are left to ourselves. It were better to sail in the most dangerous Seas without a Pilot, or to pass thro' an unknown Defart without any One to shew us our Way, then to pursue our Pilgrimage

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thro' this World without the Conduct of a Faithful and sufficient Guide.

THIS Life is to all a State of Trial for Eternity: And at the End of our Way a Heaven or a Hell stands. A Mistake will be fatal to our everlasting Interests; utterly impossible to be retriev'd afterwards, if this Life be spent in a Delusion. The Trial begins as soon as we come to the Use of Reason, to a Capacity of chusing the Good and refusing the Evil: And if GOD should shorten our Life in the midst of our Way, we shall find our Condition for ever determin'd according to our Course and Behaviour here, in that Proportion of Time which He was pleas'd to allow us. It will be well or ill with us for ever, as we are well or ill directed here.

THERE are many By-ways in our Passage, to which we are very prone to turn aside: A Thousand winding-Courses in this Labyrinth, which all come to the same miserable End: Many dangerous Errors and destructive Vices, any of which may be our Ruin. But the Way to Heaven is Strict and Difficult. It requires Pains to know it, and much more to walk in it. Hence we are told, that *wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: But strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way which leads unto Life, and few there*

Mat. vii.
13, 14.

there be that find it. The Way to Destruction looks fairer, is of larger extent, and has more Travellers in it, than the Way to Life. Should not this make us look out for a Guide? Are there By-ways *on the right hand* Isa. xxx. *and on the left?* Should not we desire then to ^{21.} *bear a Voice behind us, saying, This is the Way; walk ye in it?* If there were but a Possibility of Mistake, but a few Examples of Miscarrying, certainly it should awaken our Fear: What then must we think, when there are great Odds in the Number of dangerous Courses, and of those who take them to their utter Ruin!

AND (which greatly increases our Danger,) there are many false Guides ready and willing to seduce us. *If the Blind lead the Blind, both shall fall into the Ditch.* But as we are apt ourselves to mistake, so there are many ready to mislead us. The Devil wants no Wiles and Devices to impose upon us: He has a natural Subtlety, and long Experience, whereby he can easily cast a blind before our Eyes. In his early Attempt upon our first Parents, he prevail'd so far, when they quitted their Dependance upon GOD, as to beguile them out of Innocency into Transgression, out of a State of perfect Happiness into the most deplorable Misery. What sad Consequences then may we fear from the unwearied Arts of the old Serpent, who be-
guiled

2 Cor. xi. 3. *guiled Eve thro' his Subtlety, if we are not under the Oversight of Superior Wisdom! There are great Numbers of ill Men industrious in their Endeavours to corrupt others, ever ready by their Insinuations, their Examples and their Influence to serve the Interests of the usurping God of this World, and to draw as many of their Fellow-Creatures as they can along with them into Perdition.*

Prov. i. 10. *This is the Reason of Solomon's Caution, My Son, if Sinners entice thee, consent thou not: But our own Care will go a very little Way to our Security, unless we have a better Keeper. The Things of the World are very insnaring too: The Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, and the Pride of Life: By the fair Appearances of which, so many have been drawn off from GOD, and the Pursuit of their everlasting Interests. But above all, we have bad Hearts of our own, not only ready to betray us to other Seducers, but to mislead us themselves, if we had no other Tempters: Irregular Customs, sensual Appetites, and turbulent Passions, which impetuously hurry Men on in their Apostate State to Things which are their Sin and Shame: So that if we were left to ourselves, we should carry about us the most dangerous Guide of all others. Every*

Jam, i 14. *Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed. What need then, in so perillous a State of Things, have Young and*

and Old too, of the Assistance of an able and faithful Guide !

2. **YOUTH** has more especial Need of a Guide than any others. For this we have the concurring Judgment of all Nations, who suffer not young People to be their own Masters; but put them under Tutors and Governors. And certainly upon the most evident Reason.

YOUTH are ignorant and unexperienc'd; and therefore need the Direction of some who have more Knowledge and Judgment than themselves, to let them in to right Sentiments of Things, and point out their Way for them. They are more apt than grown People to receive Impressions. 'Tis the special Age of Instruction. Their Minds are not so strongly pre-ingag'd with various Apprehensions and Principles, as they come to be upon an advance in Years: Their Customs and Byasses are not yet fully form'd: And therefore they are drawn with more Ease either Right or Wrong, according to the Influence they are under. If they fall into bad Hands, their tender Minds are soon insnar'd by them who lye in wait to deceive. And therefore nothing can be more beneficial to them than to be under good Conduct betimes.

ESPECIALLY when we add, That there is a peculiar Levity attending their brisk Spirits,

- rits, and youthful Lusts are especially apt to be boisterous in them. While they have less Reason of their own to guide them, they have stronger Appetites and Passions, which are the worst Leaders in the World, hurrying them on (if they be not under good Restraints) into the greatest Extravagancies, to their shame and sorrow in this Life and their Misery in another. *Childhood and Youth are Vanity.* Vain Man is born like the wild Asses Colt. That Image can be apply'd to none with greater Propriety than to Youth, that they are *like the Horse or the Mule, which have no Understanding, and must be held in with Bit and Bridle, lest they come near unto you.* Look abroad into the World, and see what Numbers of Young People, *left to themselves,* are daily bringing their Parents to Shame and Grief, and even their Grey-Hairs with Sorrow to the Grave. See with what Folly and Madness they give themselves full Swing in the Indulgence of their Lusts, till they mourn at the last, when their Flesh and their Body are consumed, and say, *How have I hated Instruction, and my Heart despised Reproof!* See in such Instances, what Youth is, acting with a lawless Liberty; what the sad Effects of it are, what a dear-bought Repentance it must end in. And shall not this induce you to cry, Oh, for a good Guide of my Youth!

Eccl. xi.
10.

Pf. xxxii.
9.

Proverb.
xxix. 15.

Prov. v.
11, 12.

BESIDES, People fix for Life in the Time of their Youth ; as they do so commonly, for the Professions and Callings in which they engage for *this* Life ; it is equally true for the Course which leads to Happiness or Misery in *another*. Few, very Few of those, who give Sin their early Days, ever leave it afterwards : If they change their Vices, they seldom change their Master. The Habits of Sin are confirm'd, the Means of Amendment abate in their Force. And 'tis Odds, but you find them in the Way to Destruction at the End of their Course, who proceed in it, till Youth is over. When therefore *the Time of Youth*, is generally *the Time of Peoples Choice*, Eccles. xii. 1. that Choice which they abide by for ever after ; how necessary is it that we chuse aright then ! 'Tis of the greatest Consequence, that Youth be well-guided. I add,

3. GOD is the best Guide of Youth. None is so fit to be your supreme Director. He has the best Right to prescribe to you, because you are His in the strongest Bonds, even before you consent to be so. You rob Him of His due, while you refuse to be under His Conduct. But that is not all ; His Guidance will be most for your own Advantage. If you were to think of all the Characters to be most wish'd for in One who should undertake to direct and care for you in your tender Years, they all meet in GOD.

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W O U L D you be sure of safe Conduct? He alone is an *Infallible Guide*. All others, 'tis possible, may mislead you: Even tender Parents themselves, with all the good Wishes they can have for you: And therefore even Obedience to them is enjoyn'd with a Limitation, *in the Lord*. Ministers may prove blind Guides, tho' *their Lips ought to keep Knowledge*. But GOD is Truth itself, He cannot be deceiv'd Himself, and He can have no Inducement to mislead you. *Who teaches like Him!*

Job xxxvi. 22. W O U L D you have One fit and ready to direct you at all Times, and in all Cases? GOD is an *universal Guide*, able to furnish us with Light in every Emergency, who has laid down Directions suited to all Sorts of Persons, and every State of Life; and who has always a watchful Eye upon those who commit themselves to His Conduct. *The Eyes of the Lord are upon the Righteous; and his Ears are open to their Cry.*

Pf. lxxi. 17. H I S Guidance is ever ready to be afforded to any upright Mind: To the youngest. *O God, Thou hast taught me from my Youth*. His Will may easily be learnt out of His Word by an honest Inquirer. *The wayfaring Men, tho' Fools, shall not err therein.* And when Difficulties arise, which we cannot immediately solve by the Rule which He has left us, He is Himself easy of Access by those who are willing with an honest Heart to make Application

cation to Him. *The Lord is nigh unto all them* Ps. cxlv. 18.
that call upon Him, that call upon Him in Truth.

AND there is one Thing more peculiar to this Heavenly Guide: He is not only able and willing always to shew us our Way; but ready to assist and strengthen us to walk in it: Not only to *teach us the Way of his Statutes*; but —cxix.
to incline our Hearts unto his Testimonies, and to 33, 35, 36.
make us to go in the Path of his Commandments. We have therefore no such Guide besides, to whom we can make our Application.

4. IF we take Him for the Guide of our Youth, He will undertake for us; and continue his Conduct, till we are brought to Glory. Any that commit themselves to Him, be it never so early, have a Security that He will take them under his Care and Charge. Till this is done on our Part, we have no certain Ground to reckon upon so much as the favourable Guidance of His common Providence; nor can tell how soon, or in what Instances, He may leave us to ourselves. But if we chuse Him for our Guide, He is most ready to take us under his Conduct and Protection; and He will never leave or forsake us.

By fixing on Him for our Guide, we shall put ourselves into safe Hands for ever. And that is what we cannot be certain of as to any others, even for Time. Kind Parents on Earth may be taken from us; but God

Pf. xxvii. will not leave us Orphans. *If Father and Mother forsake me, God will take me up.* The most agreeable Relations, suppose a kind and prudent Husband, who is sometimes call'd emphatically *a Guide of the Youth*; may be wrested out of your Arms, and leave you destitute. But GOD ever lives, and will neither change his Affection, nor lose his Ability to direct and assist you.

IF you put yourselves into his Hands at the Beginning of your Days, you will set out in the World secure of the best Friend you can have thro' all the Turns and Changes of Life; who will be with you to the hoary Head, if you are spared so long. The *Psalmist's* Prayer was accomplish'd to him, and shall be to you, if you can truly use the same Plea: O God, *Thou hast taught me from my Youth, and hitherto have I declar'd thy wondrous Works; Now also, when I am old and Grey-headed, O God, forsake me not.* No, He will not forsake you; for *this God will be your God for ever and ever; He will be your Guide even unto Death. He will guide you with his Counsel, and afterward receive you to Glory.*

III. I COME to consider the Circumstance of Time, from which such a Behaviour is eminently to be expected. *From this Time,* says the Text emphatically. If we look into the Context, we may find several Hints of the

the Circumstance of Time, to which this may refer.

VII. A TIME of Conviction, wherein our Sins are set in Order before us, is a special Season, wherein GOD expects us thus to cry to him. In the *first*, and *second* Verses of this Chapter GOD sets in Israel's View her many and great Transgressions. *Thou hast played the Harlot with many Lovers.—Thou hast polluted the Land with thy Whoredoms and with thy Wickedness.* Now when I am thus arraigning thee for thy Iniquity, wilt thou not *from this Time*, say unto me, my Father? Whenever GOD impresses Convictions of Sin upon your Souls in this World, it is not to torment you before the Time, but to bring you to yourselves, and so to Him. Such a Season as this is a *Time of Love*. GOD makes you sensible of your Distemper, that you may speedily apply to the Physician, before your Case is desperate; and submit to the proper Methods of Cure, which he is so ready to Use with You. You'll never Value him, nor be reconcil'd to his Medicines, as long as you are insensible of your Disease. *The whole have no need of the Physician, Luke v. but they that are Sick.* But when you see your Sick-
ness, it may be hop'd Help will be welcome. Now Youth is the most usual Time of lively Convictions, especially for those who have the Advantage of Gospel-Light
and

and Calls from their Youth ; and Consequently for them it is the most likely Season of Grace. Those who outgrow the early Admonitions, which G O D and Conscience give them of their Sins in that Period of Life when their Hearts are most tender, are commonly reduc'd to fewer and weaker Convictious in an after-life ; and very often *their Consciences become seared as with an hot Iron.* Oh see therefore that you stifle not, that you *rebel not against* your early Light ; but when your Guilt is set in your View, that you speedily take the true Course to remove it.

2. A T I M E of Correction and Affliction is an Advantagious Occasion, upon which it may be hop'd you should cry to G O D, *my Father.* In the Verse immediately before the Text, G O D puts *Israel* in Mind of the Judgments He had brought upon them for their Sins. *Therefore the Showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter Rain.* And thereupon G O D speaks of it as an astonishing Thing, that under such Circumstances they *had a Whore's forehead, and refus'd to be asham'd.* Instead of continuing so obstinate, *wilt thou not rather,* says he, *from this time cry unto me, my Father, thou art the Guide of my Youth ?* Affliction, is intended by G O D when milder Methods will not do, to bring Men to Repentance by some present Tastes of the Bitterness

terness of Sin. Corrections are the Rod of a Father to bring us to Filial Duty. The Prodigal began to be in Want, was forc'd to feed upon husks; he felt the melancholy Effects of his own Prodigality : And this brought him to himself, to consider his Sin and Folly, and to resolve to arise and return to his Father. Young People, in this World where Man is born to Trouble, frequently have a Share of it: Sometimes they bring Misery upon themselves by their own Extravagancies; or they fall betimes under some kind Discipline of GOD. And if either the one or the other lead them to GOD and Religion; they will magnify GOD to all Eternity for that which for the present is not Joyous, but Grievous. If GOD then in his Providence make you to *bear the Yoke of Affliction* in your Youth, let that induce you to *bear the Yoke of Obedience* in your early Days too.

3. A TIME of the Discovery of Grace is a particular Opportunity, which should be improv'd to lead us to GOD and engage us to put ourselves under his Conduct. In *ver. 1.* GOD calls upon these People, after the Discovery of their Sins, *Yet return unto me, saith the Lord.* And in *ver. 5.* *Will he reserve his Anger for ever? Will he keep it to the End?* No, he is ready to Pardon. *Wilt thou not then from this time, (when I have shewn my gracious*

gracious Inclinations to thee,) *cry unto me, my Father, &c.* What, Sinner! Shall not Mercy melt thy Heart? Canst thou stand out against such kind Declarations from an offended GOD? Hast thou *spoken and done evil Things as thou couldst?* And is GOD still willing to receive thee? Is He yet inviting thee to return? Is thy Father, after all that thou hast done against him, observing thy Behaviour with a Compassionate Eye, marking any Tendencies towards a Return, even while thou art *yet a great Way off?* Is He not only ready to receive thee, but even to *run to meet thee, to fall on thy Neck and kiss thee?* Yes, if He can but see any Thing hopeful in thee; if He can but *hear thee bemoaning thyself thus,*

Ver. 5. *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a Bullock unaccustomed to the Yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the Lord my God.* If He that knows the Heart, can but hear such Language from thy Heart; it will be soon his Return, *Is Ephraim my dear Son? Is he a pleasant Child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my Bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have Mercy upon him, saith the Lord.* He is waiting to be gracious, affording thee many uncovenanted Mercies in the mean While; and preventing thee with many Blessings, the Result of his Sovereign Goodness. Canst thou stand out against such unparallel'd Grace!

Such

Such amazing Compassion of thy Father in Heaven! If thou can't thus *despise the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering*, then fear the final Sentence for contemned Grace, and abus'd Patience. Can't thou think any other, than that *thou art treasuring up Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and the Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God!*

4. *THE present Time*, is the fittest Time for doing this, if it be not done already. *From this very Time* when thou art call'd to it, thou hast the greatest Reason to come and make Application to me. *To Day, while it is called to Day*; whatever Age of Life you happen now to be arriv'd at. If Time past have been neglected; whatever fairer Opportunities you might have had in that, they are gone and over, and cannot be recall'd. And this Day is undoubtedly a better Season than to Morrow. *Now, for certain, is an accepted* 2 Cor. vi. *Time, now is a Day of Salvation*: As long as ². you have Life and the Calls of the GOSPEL, and such a Message directed to you. But for any Time to come, need I tell you that it is an absolute Uncertainty! You may never have another Day. Several, who were in this Assembly a Year ago, and some of them in the Flower of their Age, are gone the Way of all Flesh: And 'tis not to be expected, that *all* of you should be either here or in our

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World

World a Year hence. He * that was your Monitor from this Place for so many Years past in this Annual Endeavour to do Good, and the last Season in particular, was very soon after laid in the silent Grave : And so are some since, who then heard him. 'Tis great Odds, but some of us will be there too before another of these Annual Revolutions. Particularize the Thought, I beseech you. Why not *You*, or *You* in particular, as well as Another? Is it safe then venturing a Delay, when your All is at Stake!

BUT suppose you had a Certainty of Time to come, you are never like to have so convenient a Season as the present. Impediments will multiply in your Way; ill Customs and Prejudices be confirm'd : Convictions are like to become greater Rarities, and the Influence of all your Advantages to abate : That if your Recovery is now difficult, it will be unspeakably more so by Delay.

AND yet if you were sure of Time, and a proper Time too hereafter; is not the Time past of your Lives too much by far to be allow'd to the service of Sin and Satan? to have liv'd in Hostility to the God that made you, offending and grieving your heavenly Father? Can you be too early in securing the best Friend, the only certain Guide thro' a

* Dr. Williams.

dangerous

dangerous World? Will it be any prejudice to you to lay in for preventing such unhappy Miscarriages, as at the best will make mournful Work for Repentance? Can you begin to be wise, and to settle your everlasting Interest too soon? *Consider this, and shew yourselves Men, O ye Transgressors.*

AND now if you are upon the whole convinc'd of the Wisdom and Expedience of owning God for the Guide of your Youth; it may still be an Inquiry with you, *How you are to expect his Guidance?* That leads me to the Fourth Head.

IV. To lay down some proper Directions in this Matter. And it may be useful to hint to you, both the Means wherein you are to expect God should conduct you, and your Duty for securing such an Advantage.

First, I WOULD direct your Expectation as to the Ways and Means wherein you may hope that God will communicate Light and Direction to you.

HE has not taught you to expect, That He will be your Guide by an immediate Voice from Heaven, or by any miraculous Interposals. You are not to be directed by an imaginary Light within, which has no certain Measure, and of which you can give no reasonable Account. But there are eminently

Three Ways wherein GOD encourages us to wait for his Guidance.

- I. By *his Word*; which is the Rule both of our Duty and our Hopes. In the Light of Holy Scripture the Mind of GOD is fully set before us, with as much Certainty and Authority as if we could hear it pronounc'd by his own Mouth: For *all Scripture is given by Inspiration of God; and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, and Instruction in Righteousness.* And it deserves to be particularly observ'd by young People, That this Account of the extensive Usefulness of the Scriptures follows upon mentioning the Example of One, who was early acquainted with them. *Thou (Timothy) from a Child hast known the Holy Scriptures.* GOD intended them to be the standing Signification of his Will for the Use of young as well as old. As the most advanc'd in Years cannot out-grow the Use of *this Light to their Feet, and Lamp to their Paths*; so it is not rais'd too high for the young: They are particularly directed to have Recourse to it for their Conduct.
- 2 Tim. iii. 16. *Wherewithal shall a young Man cleanse his Way? by taking heed thereto according to thy Word.* The Scripture is GOD's Law, by which we may as certainly know how to chuse the Good, and refuse the Evil, as if we had GOD for our immediate Monitor. He has indeed appointed subordinate Guides, to make the Instructions
- Psam. cxix. 9.

structions of his Word more plain : But if they speak not according to the Law and the Testimony, 'tis because there is no Light in them. Isa. viii. 20.

2. BY His Spirit : Not that we are to expect any new and different Revelations of the Divine Will from those contain'd in Scripture. No Suggestion can be from the Spirit of GOD, which is contrary to his Word, any more than GOD can be contrary to Himself : Nor does his Spirit direct us to any Thing, which upon serious Consideration, we may not find warranted by his Word ; because He has given us that as a perfect Rule. And yet we have great Need of the farther Guidance of his Spirit ; not to discover to us new Things which have no Foundation in the Bible ; but to set the Matters revealed in a clearer Light, and to make the Scales fall off our Eyes, that we may see them distinctly. Therefore tho' David had the written Law, he prays, *Teach me to do thy Will, O God : Thy Spirit is good, lead me into the Land of Uprightness.* Psalm cxliii. 10. Our Understandings need Illuminations. David prays for it, *Open Thou mine Eyes, that I may behold wondrous Things out of thy Law.* Psalm cxix. 18. What he pray'd for, no Doubt he obtain'd : And so did CHRIST's Disciples after his Resurrection. *Then opened he their Understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures.* Luk. xxiv. 45. And our Hearts need an effectual Impression, to dispose us to follow his Conduct ;

2 Cor. iv. duct; and this is made, when *the Light of the*
 6. *glorious Gospel shines into our Hearts.* Happy
 they, who are led by the Spirit, to be go-
 vern'd by the Word of GOD.

3. BY *his Providence.* So GOD has the
 Supreme Management of all our Lot and
 Circumstances; and has encourag'd us to
 Hope, they shall be order'd for our real Ad-
 vantage, if we rank ourselves among the
 People of his Care. We are obliged indeed

Pfal. cxii. to *guide our own Affairs with Discretion.* This
 5. is made the Character of a Good Man. *i. e.*
 to make Use of all the prudential Methods
 in our Power, which have the most proper
 Tendency to the Prosperity of our Affairs.

Jer. x. 23. But still *the Way of Man is not in himself; 'tis*
not in Man that walketh to direct his Steps.
 GOD will have the Sovereign disposal of
 them. And 'tis a Declaration for the Encou-

Pfalm *steps are ordered of the Lord:* Not only under
 xxxvii. 23. the common Care and Direction of his Pro-
 vidence, as the Steps of all Men are; but in
 a peculiar Sense the Steps of a Good Man
 are under a favorable Conduct, steadily di-
 rected to the best Ends of his spiritual and
 eternal Good. And by this Providential Di-
 rection of our Circumstances GOD is our
 Guide also in the Way of our Duty. By
 this means He makes our Way plain before
 us, explains his Word, and points us to our
 present

present Work, as made seasonable by the Events which befall us.

THESE are the Methods of Divine Conduct we are taught to expect: His Word as our standing Rule; his Spirit as our inward Monitor according to that Rule; and his Providence determining our Circumstances, and so chalking out our particular Duty from Time to Time. It remains that I shew.

Secondly, WHAT lies upon us in order to the securing of GOD's gracious Conduct.

1. As the Foundation of all, we must give up ourselves solemnly, absolutely and unreservedly to His Conduct, *with full purpose of Heart of cleaving to the Lord*. We cannot depend upon His Guidance without an entire Surrender into His Hands, and a Determination to follow Him without Exception. *How shall I put thee among the Children?* Jer. iii 19. Says GOD to these very People in the Text: *I said, Thou shalt call me, my Father, and shalt not turn away from me.* He will care for you as His own, if you heartily *join yourselves to Jer. l. 5.* *Him in a perpetual Covenant never to be forgotten.* *I beseech you therefore, Brethren, my Younger Rom. xii.* Brethren, *by the Mercies of God, all the Mer-*^{1.} *cies by which he has been drawing you from your Beginning hitherto, and all the Mercies included in his Gracious Conduct thro' Life, and those which shall be the everlasting*
Portion

Portion of them who are led by his Counsel, *that you render yourselves a Holy, a Living, and an acceptable Sacrifice, which is your reasonable Service.*

2. DILIGENTLY attend to all the Ways, wherein GOD has encourag'd you to expect His Guidance.

SEARCH the Scriptures frequently, and meditate therein Day and Night. If your Bibles are a neglected Book, you will be little the better for the Perfection of the Rule. And tho' GOD has made His Will there sufficiently plain, He has wisely left such Difficulties as make Pains and Application necessary to Successful Enquiries. *My Son, if thou wilt receive my Words, and hide my Commandments with thee ; so that thou incline thine Ear unto Wisdom, and apply thine Heart unto Understanding ; if thou seekest her as Silver, and searchest for her, as for hid Treasure ; then shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God.* It will be your Wisdom to put yourselves betimes under the Care of some Faithful Spiritual Guide. Not to allow any Man to be Lord of your Faith, or to direct your Conscience blindfold. No, ever Use the Noble Caution of the Bereans, to search the Scriptures diligently, whether that which they say, either in the Pulpit or out of it, be so. Trust no Man to see for you, since no Man can answer for you at the last Day:

Nor

Prov. ii.
1, &c.

Act. xvii.
11.

Nor follow any Man farther than he follows CHRIST. But desire the Assistance of some faithful Minister in your Enquiries, as one of CHRIST's appointed Ways to furnish you with the Light necessary to your judging for yourselves. Listen to every good Motion within your own Breasts: Try it by the Word of GOD, and if it be agreeable to that, you may conclude it to be a kind Hint from the good Spirit of GOD. And observe the steps of Divine Providence; that you may discover what GOD is now calling you out to, and may follow Him in seasonable Duty whithersoever he leads you.

3. CAREFULLY maintain a Frame of Soul ever open to Light. Be of a teachable and tractable Spirit. Never imagine yourselves to be grown too wise to learn, or to be possess'd of such a Sufficiency as leaves no Room for Improvment. Remember the State you are in, how liable to mistake; and that as long as you continue upon Earth, you will not have already attain'd, or be already perfect. Self-conceit is one of the greatest Impediments in the World to a good Direction; both in the Nature of the Thing, and with Respect to the Promise of GOD. *Good* PR. xxv: 8, 9.
and upright is the Lord: Therefore will He teach Sinners in the Way. The Meek will He guide in Judgment, and the Meek He will teach his Way.

4. JOIN earnest Prayer to GOD for His Guidance. He expects (and most reasonably) to be enquir'd of for so great a Blessing. Let it be the habitual Desire of your Soul, *O that my Heart were directed to keep thy Statutes!* Apply to Him with that Plea from your perilous State. *I am a Stranger in the Earth : hide not thy Commandments from me.* And from a Sense of your Need of inward Direction, be solicitous that He would *not take His Holy Spirit from you.* Prayer is one of the established Terms of his Promise. *Trust in the Lord with all thine Heart ; and lean not to thine own Understanding. In all thy Ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy Paths.* But ever remember to pray for all in the Name of JESUS CHRIST, who as He was sent from GOD to shew you the Way of Salvation, is now with GOD to offer up Incense with your Prayers, and make them successful.
- Pf. cxix. 5.
Ver. 19.
Pf. li. 11.
Prov. iii. 5, 6.
John xiv. 13.

5. CONSCIENTIOUSLY follow His Conduct, as far as you can discern it. There is no Direction of greater Importance than this, That you keep the Way of GOD, as far as He hath shewn it you. Why should He throw away his Light and Guidance upon those who habitually neglect it, and make no good Use of it ? But if you honestly endeavour an answerable Practice to the Degrees of Knowledge you have ; to live up to your Light, you may be sure of more, as far as it shall be necessary.

necessary. *If any Man will do his Will, he shall* John vii. *know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or* ^{17.} *whether I speak of myself.*

I'LL conclude all with Two Inferences.

I. THE Reason upon which GOD here Claims to be the Guide of their Youth, as he was their Father, plainly supposes the Obligation which Young People lye under to be guided by their Parents in Lawful Things. He argues upon this as allow'd by all to be a just Consequence from that Relation; as in another Place, *A Son honoureth his Father, and* Mal. i. 6. *a Servant his Master: If then I be a Father, where is mine Honour? And if I be a Master, where is my Fear?* So here if you own me for your Father, you must own me for the Guide of your Youth. Whereby you may plainly collect the Duty you owe to your natural Parents. Not indeed to obey them in any Thing contrary to the Duty you owe to your Heavenly Father. But you are to consider them as pointed out to be your Principal Guides under Him, by the Relation to them in which He has plac'd you. Because they are your Parents, they are to be the Guides of your Youth. If therefore you should suffer yourselves to slight their Instructions, to treat them with Disrespect, to neglect their Advice, or even to Act independently without it in Matters of Consequence; you may be sure you are going out of God's Way,

Way, and will at one Time or other find the Guilt of it to sit Heavy upon your Consciences.

2. If young Persons have so much Reason to apply to GOD as their Father and Guide, it must certainly be high Time for those advanc'd in Years to arise and return to their Father. If you have proceeded far in Life without committing yourselves to His Conduct; 'tis a Wonder of Mercy that He has not suffer'd you to ruin yourselves utterly and irrecoverably before now; that you are yet in the Way, and under a Possibility of escaping Destruction. You are in far more Danger of a final Miscarriage, when you have been misled so long. If yet you will allow yourselves to think, you must perceive, that none can guide you to Heaven but your Heavenly Father. There is still Hope, that He will receive you under his Conduct; if from this Day you'll renounce the false Guides which have led you captive, and yield yourselves to the LORD. Be persuaded then, while you are yet by the Way, to cry to GOD as for your Lives, That He will put you among his Children, and pluck you as Brands out of the Burning.

F I N I S.

